

NATIONAL TAXPAYER ADVOCATYE
PUBLIC FORUM STATEMENT
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I am LaMarr Queen, the Tax Program Coordinator for Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) - Randolph, an IRS VITA site here in San Antonio, Texas. I retired from the Air Force in 2007 after 26 years of service. My last 13 years were as a paralegal and retired as the Law Office Manager at Headquarters Air Education and Training Command on JBSA-Randolph. The legal office on most installations is the entity responsible for the installation tax centers. So for 13 years of my Air Force career, I had some dealings with the VITA Tax Program. A little less than a year after retiring, I was hired as the Tax Program Coordinator for JBSA-Randolph.

In my role as Tax Program Coordinator, my duties include managing the JBSA-Randolph tax center, providing tax law and return preparation training each year to preparers, preparing tax returns, explaining tax law to clients to help them understand situations on their tax returns, counseling individuals on things they can do to improve their tax return if they end up with a balance due, and helping clients with IRS letters that they may receive. During my 8 year tenure as the Tax Program Coordinator, our office has prepared over 13,000 returns for active duty military and their dependents, retired military personnel and their dependents, and for guard and reserve personnel and their dependents.

During the past 8 years I have been, for the most part, satisfied with the service provided by the IRS. As a VITA site, we have a spec rep that we work with not only during tax season, but year round regarding our site. Our spec reps have been more than helpful when I was setting up our site every year, in getting us the required materials to run our site, and in answering questions that I or my preparers may have regarding tax issues or interpretations of tax law.

The biggest issue that I have seen, heard of, and experienced, is the wait times to talk to an IRS person regarding a tax return. Not only is this an issue during tax filing season, but after the filing season as well - I have called in June and been on hold for over an hour. When you call, and most of the time there is a client sitting right there at your desk, most wait times are in excess of 45 minutes. I have waited as long as 90 minutes before talking to a real person on the phone. And then, when they finally do answer, the person you are talking to is in a hurry and they rush their name and IRS number. It is like being at an auction and they are the auctioneer— you can't understand them because they talk so fast. And, at other times, after waiting for what seems like an eternity, you get pushed out of the cue and hung up on. That is so frustrating and aggravating. Clients just want to give up and forget the whole issue and deal with it later.

When you do finally get to talk to a representative, some of them are very knowledgeable and able to help. Others seem like it is their first day on the job and fumble around looking for answers and constantly putting you on hold searching for answers or trying to get help from someone else. I understand that the IRS hired folks on a temporary basis to help with phone calls during the 2016 filing season (2015 taxes). This is all well and good, but the IRS needs to hire more permanent employees that gain knowledge and experience and are better able to help taxpayers over the phone, not temporary employees with nothing at stake because their job ends shortly after tax filing season.

The future state of the IRS. Having an online taxpayer account for taxpayers makes me nervous. With all the right security measures, and them constantly being updated, I think this could be a great tool. But, as we've seen with OPM and the IRS, the bad guys that want to hack into a system find a way to do it. I was one of the unlucky ones that had my info stolen from OPM. Now it's a constant daily reminder that I need to keep an even closer eye on my information and checking my credit reports to ensure that no one is using my information.

I don't think it is a good idea for the taxpayer to be able to let his/her tax preparer have access to their online account. Yes, I own my own tax business, and yes this might make things easier for me to help the client, but I know there are unscrupulous people out there who will use this to their advantage – it is just too easy. As I said before, maybe with the right security measures it could work. It is just a scary thought.

And here is the other issue. Many of the older taxpayers don't have computers, much less access to the internet. And they don't want either. I do returns for older folks that do not trust e-filing and will mail their return in instead of e-filing it. And, some don't know how to use a computer and don't want to learn. They aren't going to create an online account to access their information or get messages from the IRS. It is very similar with lower income families who can't afford a computer or the internet. They aren't going to create an online account either. So the IRS will still have to man the phones and keep knowledgeable people to help those folks who don't trust the electronics.

LaMarr Queen